



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...*Clostridium difficile* Infections (CDI)

What is a *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI)?

Clostridium difficile infection, or CDI, is a type of infection in the colon that is caused by *Clostridium difficile* (*C. diff*) bacteria. The bacteria can be found in the intestines of many healthy people, although it does not normally cause infection. Most cases of CDI happen in healthcare facilities in patients with weakened immune systems or who have been on antibiotics, but there are some cases that can happen in schools or within the general community.

How is *Clostridium difficile* spread?

Clostridium difficile is shed in human waste, so it can be found in bathrooms and on medical equipment that has not been properly cleaned. It can be carried on the hands of healthcare workers and visitors that touch those dirty surfaces and then spread to other patients and other areas of the healthcare facility. *C. diff* is unique in that it has the ability to form spores which allow it to survive out in the open for very long periods of time. The spores can live on surfaces such as bed rails, doorknobs, medical equipment, and bathroom fixtures, so if those surfaces are not cleaned well, the germs can be spread.

Who is at risk for CDI?

Any hospitalized person can be at risk for getting CDI. However, some patients are more at risk than others. Older patients, people who have a weakened immune system, and people who have been taking antibiotics are particularly at risk. Healthy visitors are not usually at risk for getting CDI. However, they should be sure to always wash their hands before and after visiting.

How do I know if I have CDI?

Your healthcare provider will most likely need to take a stool sample and run some tests in order to determine if you have CDI.

What are the symptoms of CDI?

CDI can cause diarrhea, fever, abdominal pain, nausea, and loss of appetite. Symptoms can range from mild to very severe in some patients.

How can CDI be treated?

Your healthcare provider will determine the right treatment for your infection. The treatment may involve stopping any antibiotics that you had been using, starting a new antibiotic, or even surgery in some severe cases.

How is CDI prevented?

The best way to prevent CDI is with proper hand hygiene. Alcohol-based hand rubs do not kill *C. diff* spores, so people should wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. In addition to proper hand hygiene, a cap, gown, gloves, and/or mask might be needed.

Proper environmental cleaning is also a way to prevent CDI. A healthcare facility's cleaning staff should pay special attention to high-touch areas in a person's room, such as doorknobs, phones, and bathrooms.

Proper antibiotic use is also very important in preventing CDI. The overuse or misuse of antibiotics can lead to germ resistance, which can put you at increased risk for CDI. For this reason, you should use antibiotics exactly as prescribed by your healthcare provider.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information about *Clostridium difficile* infections or healthcare associated infections, refer to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/hai/>

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/24769.htm>

http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/cdiff/Cdiff_infect.html

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